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## ***Veteran's Tale***

# **Robert Garwood Says Vietnam Didn't Return Some American POWs**

## **The Court-Martialed Marine Tells of Prisoners Kept After 1973 Repatriations**

## **On a Boxcar Near Yen Bay**

By BILL PAUL

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Nearly 10 years after the Vietnam War ended, interested Americans continue to press for an accounting of the nearly 2,500 U.S. servicemen and civilians still listed as missing in action in Southeast Asia.

Many families of missing men cling to the belief that some Americans still are being held prisoner. And they give no credence to Vietnam's repeated assertions that it now holds no Americans in custody. During Veterans Day ceremonies last month, President Reagan held out the possibility that "some may still be saved."

Reports have been made of POW sightings by Vietnamese refugees, and some such stories arrived through intelligence channels. Although many of the accounts have been discredited by U.S. officials, a campaign by private MIA groups to find and free the missing continues. The Defense Department says that it currently is evaluating 176 unresolved sightings of U.S. POWs by refugees and other supposed eyewitnesses.

John LeBoutillier, a Long Island Republican who while in Congress from 1981 to 1983 served on the House Task Force on Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, wrote in a newspaper article last August that "privately, Defense Intelligence Agency analysts concede that POWs are still alive there, differing only on how many there are. The most recent estimates range from 20 to 253."

### **Robert Garwood's Story**

Now, in a more detailed statement about POWs than anything previously made public, an American says he knows that there were at least 70 Americans held prisoner in Vietnam as of the late 1970s—long after all prisoners had supposedly been repatriated.

Former Marine Pfc. Robert Garwood says in interviews with The Wall Street Journal that he saw U.S. prisoners and heard about still others from Vietnamese

prison guards between 1973 and 1979, during much of which time he was something of a trusty of the Vietnamese, fixing trucks and doing other repair work in Vietnam.

Mr. Garwood isn't the most credible of witnesses. He remained in Vietnam long after other Americans held prisoner were returned to the U.S. The Marine Corps accused him of desertion and collaboration. And when he did come home in 1979, he faced court-martial. In 1981 he was found guilty of collaboration. He was found not guilty of desertion. His rank was reduced to private from private first class, and he forfeited back pay. The U.S. government had sought to interview Mr. Garwood about his Vietnam experiences when he returned to the U.S., but he refused to cooperate. He didn't take the stand at his court-martial. And he didn't tell of POWs still living in Vietnam in his 1983 biography, "Conversations With the Enemy." He has come forward now, he says, because he wants to clear his conscience.

### **Use as Guinea Pigs**

Mr. Garwood says he knows that in the late 1970s Americans still were held at four places—prison camps at Bat Bat and Yen Bay (35 miles and 80 miles northwest of Hanoi); at a military complex on Ly Nam De Street in Hanoi; and at a warehouse in Gia Lam, a suburb east of Hanoi.

Some American captives at Bat Bat, he says, were used as guinea pigs in a course on psychological warfare given by the Viet-

namese to visiting Cuban and Palestinian groups, among others.

Richard Childress, a White House official responsible for MIA efforts, refuses to comment on Mr. Garwood's statements. He refers questions to a Pentagon spokesman, who declines to comment except to criticize Mr. Garwood for speaking to a newspaper rather than to government officials. "If he has information, he owes it to them [any POWs] to provide this information to a responsible agency. It's decidedly unhelpful to withhold information of this nature for five years, then release it in a sensationalist manner."

Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as assistant to President Carter for national security affairs, and Alexander M. Haig, who was President Reagan's first secretary of state, both say that they have never seen convincing evidence that Vietnam held American POWs after the war.

Gen. Eugene Tighe, who was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency until he retired in 1981, is more forthright in reacting to what Mr. Garwood has to say. In response to a summary of Mr. Garwood's story, the general says: "That doesn't sound unrealistic at all. A few [of Mr. Garwood's] data coincide with data I had." Gen. Tighe's former assistant at the DIA, Adm. Jerry Tuttle, says that parts of Mr. Garwood's story are consistent with reports he heard while at the agency.

Mr. Garwood's psychiatrist, C. Robert Showalter, who is also an associate director of the University of Virginia's Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy, says that Mr. Garwood first told him about remaining POWs six months ago. Dr. Showalter says that Mr. Garwood's recollections of his 14 years in Vietnam have become clearer and more coherent during the past year. Like many other Vietnam veterans, Mr. Garwood is said to suffer "post-traumatic stress disorder," a condition characterized by painful reexperiencing of wartime events in nightmares and in flashbacks, Dr. Showalter says.

Mr. Garwood isn't an articulate man. During interviews with this newspaper, which took place over two nights in Mr. Garwood's Northern Virginia house, Mr. Garwood answered questions slowly, appearing at times to be dredging answers from deep in his memory.

He says that from 1970 until the fall of 1973—six months after "Operation Homecoming," during which nearly 600 captive Americans were returned to the U.S.—he was held by the Vietnamese at Bat Bat. He then was moved to Gia Lam, he says, where he stayed until 1975. He visited there often after 1975, until he sought and was allowed to leave the country in 1979. From 1975 until 1979, he says, he was at Yen Bay, but sometimes he would spend the night in Ly Nam De Street when a road job prevented him from returning to Yen Bay by nightfall.

He saw American prisoners, he says, at each of those locations, and once he observed a group of them being moved by train. He says he heard the men speak to one another in American-accented English. He says that Vietnamese guards told him about U.S. POWs in Vietnam, and they discussed captive Americans in his presence. Mr. Garwood, who speaks Vietnamese, says he had a standing order not to talk with other Americans.

Mr. Garwood doesn't know many prisoners' names. Asked to make a list, he wrote down 10 partial names including four that appear to be last names. The rest are first names or names that could be either first or last names. Mr. Garwood specified where the named individuals were held, but he cautioned that since he picked up the names by listening to guards' conversations, he can't be certain that every name is correct.

Nevertheless, a check of Mr. Garwood's list against the official U.S. MIA list suggests at least a few possible matches. The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, a relatives' group based in Washington, D.C., last week received a copy of Mr. Garwood's list.

Mr. Garwood says he knew of 40 to 60 prisoners at Yen Bay, 20 or so in the Bat Bat District of Son Tay Province, six at Gia Lam, and six or seven at Ly Nam De. He

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